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SUBJECT: Minsk Election Weekly VII (January 28-February 3)

¶1. This is the seventh in a weekly series of election-oriented reports, providing brief items of interest related to the March 19, 2006 presidential elections.

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Signature Results  
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¶2. After a month of signature collection, the CEC announced the following results:

Lukashenko	1,905,631 signatures
Milinkevich	198,559
Kozulin	156,618
Gaidukevich	150,319
Frolov	58,775
Paznyak	719

The CEC is currently checking the signatures for authenticity and will announce between February 16 and 19 who the candidates are.

¶3. Milinkevich's campaign manager, Sergey Kalyakin, told the press on January 28 that Lukashenko should be barred from the campaign for multiple irregularities during signature collection. Kalyakin claimed state enterprises, organizations, schools and universities, and police departments were forced to submit signatures from employees and students. [Comment: Post has heard similar accusations from numerous reliable sources.]

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The Candidates  
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And then there were Four

¶4. On January 26, Zenon Paznyak, leader of the Christian Conservative Party, announced he would drop out of the presidential race. Even though he claimed his party had collected more than 100,000 signatures, he did not think the Central Election Commission (CEC) would allow his registration as a candidate. Instead, Paznyak is advocating that voters cast fake ballots, then present their real ballots to opposition groups as a means of judging how many vote against Lukashenko. Thus leaves four possibly candidates, Lukashenko, Gaidukevich, Milinkevich and Kozulin.

## Lukashenko President Enough for Belarus

15. In a January 27 interview to state television, Lukashenko argued to the press why Belarus needs no other president: "I'm fighting disasters to save our people and prove during this election campaign, prove yet another time that you have a good president and don't need any other president. Even during the severe freeze this year there were fewer breakdowns and less disorder than in previous years when temperatures did not drop as low. What does that speak of? That means that the government is busy solving people's vital problems. We created an independent, sovereign state. What else do we need? And this sovereign, independent state, the state's people elected a president and the president is working for the benefit of the people. He is battling troubles and hardships that can befall our country." Exaggerating the threat of a windy day in August that blew down trees around Minsk, he claimed, "We might have been left without bread, and \$140 million would not have been enough to import grain. We would have had to use foreign exchange and gold reserves to save people, but we salvaged the crop. We saved the country. We can see milk, meat, butter, fats, etc., on the counters today. Because grain also means feed, not just bread. We salvaged the crop. This speaks about the efficiency of the government."

## Limited Cooperation Possible

16. On January 27, Kozulin sent a letter to Milinkevich suggesting they support each other in the event one does not get registered as a candidate. He also proposed the two work together to monitor the campaign and elections.

## Frolov Supports Kozulin

17. After dropping out of the race, on February 1 Valery Frolov threw his support behind Kozulin. Frolov said he supports Kozulin because both belong to the same social-democratic party. On January 26, jailed presidential hopeful Sergey Skrebets also announced his support for Kozulin. In the previous parliament, Frolov and Skrebets were both members of the Respublika faction.

## No Need to Stay in Belarus

18. Over the past week, three of the four likely candidates traveled abroad. Milinkevich was in Brussels January 30 to February 1, where he met with members of the European parliament, Head of the European Commission Jose Barroso, EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner, EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana, and Ukraine's Yulia Tymoshenko and FM Boris Tarasyuk. On February 2 he stopped in Berlin to meet Chancellor Angela Merkel. Prior to Brussels he spoke at a session of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly in Strasbourg. Meanwhile, Kozulin traveled to Lithuania to meet Prime Minister Brazauskas. On February 1, Lukashenko went to Moscow for Boris Yeltsin's birthday party. This followed a trip to St. Petersburg to meet Vladimir Putin last week.

## Media Issues

## Election Gets Little Press

19. Many observers have told Post state media has largely ignored the presidential election. There are no advertisements or other visible signs of an impending election in Minsk. On February 2, the Belarusian Association of Journalists confirmed this observation. BAJ announced that from January 16 to 27, the deadline for submitting signatures, state television channel ONT dedicated just over one minute to election coverage. Instead, state television covered heavily Lukashenko's daily work and activities. [Comment: there is next to no independent Belarusian television.] After monitoring all state media, BAJ stated that Lukashenko gets far more coverage than all of the other candidates, election observers and the Central Election Commission combined. Post has observed that state media rarely names opposition

candidates, instead referring to them simply as "the opposition" or "nationalists."

#### Lukashenko and Kozulin Dominate the Papers

¶10. BAJ also monitored coverage of candidates in state and independent newspapers from January 16 to 27. The main state newspaper, Sovetskaya Belorussiya, devoted 80% of its election coverage to Lukashenko, and 0.7% to Milinkevich and Paznyak. Other state papers only covered Lukashenko. No other candidates received any coverage. [Note: Sovetskaya Belarussiya is Belarus' largest newspaper, and is part of the Presidential Administration.] Independent paper Narodnaya Volya gave 18.7% of its entire reporting to Kozulin, 13% to Lukashenko, and 2.4% to Milinkevich. Independent paper Komsomolskaya Pravda devoted 31% of its election coverage to Kozulin, 13% to Skrebets (who had dropped out by that point), 4.6% to Lukashenko and 2.2% to Milinkevich. However, Komsomolskaya Pravda, the largest independent newspaper, carried a lengthy interview with Milinkevich on February 2.

#### Papers Seized

¶11. On January 30, police in Zhlobin seized 700 copies of Tovarisch, the newspaper of the pro-democracy Communist Party (who support Milinkevich). The papers contained information on Milinkevich and were seized when police stopped the vehicle carrying them en route to Gomel. Tovarisch's editor complained to the police, claiming his paper is legally registered.

#### Russian Pop Stars for Lukashenko

¶12. State television channel ONT announced it would host a six-week series of concerts featuring unnamed Russian pop stars, culminating in a massive concert in Minsk on March 10 (four days before the start of early voting). ONT has named the concert series "Za Belarus" [For Belarus], the same slogan Lukashenko used for his publicity campaign in favor of the 2004 referendum removing presidential term limits, and is using again on billboards across the city.

#### ----- Biased Polling -----

#### Presidential Administration Says 76.7% to Vote for Lukashenko

¶13. On February 2, the Institute for Social-Political Research of the Presidential Administration announced the results of a poll it conducted across the country, with 1,583 respondents. The main results are:

--76.7% will vote for Lukashenko;

--No other candidate received more than 2% (the GOB did not release any more detailed results);

--87.5% rate Lukashenko's work as positive (52.9%) or mostly positive (34.6%);

--88.3% says Lukashenko is fulfilling his electoral promises, while "only 3%" say he is not;

--94.3% say it is important who is chosen as the next president;

--89.2% believe their quality of life depends on who is elected;

--92.1% intend to participate in the elections;

--43.5% say the elections will be fully free, transparent and open; 45.9% think there will be minor violations, but these will not affect the outcome; and 5.9% think there will be major violations.

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"West to Fund Street Riots"

¶14. In a January 27 interview with all three state television channels, Lukashenko said the opposition was likely to engage in street protests after the elections, "They will contest [their defeat] the way they never did before. Why? Because they've got money. They are paid money for street riots. Our "friends" in the West told the opposition that they would provide money only to fund unrest in the country. But you know, there are few fools even among the opposition, among those who support other candidates. They have children, families, they are living in this society, they won't all flee abroad. Those who manage this process, who currently oppose the president, the opposition's contender, have already secured a place for themselves, maybe in Germany, maybe in America, maybe in Poland following in the footsteps of some famous opposition figures. They will flee from here. But there are people who believe. And will they take to the streets as cannon fodder and defend others' interests, being aware that while these will flee, they will have to stay? Do those who currently back the opposition, sincerely back and believe them need riots, instability? No." To prevent rioting, Lukashenko said the government would "twist the heads off" anyone taking to the streets. He added, "We have no such squares where tents will be put up. I guarantee this."

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Quote of the Week

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¶15. Lukashenko in a January 27 interview to all three Belarusian state television channels on the election campaign:

"I do not need to compete with anyone. I must work. The people want me to work. It has been extremely cold for ten days. These were the ten days of my political campaign. Imagine if everything began to freeze, break, and the whole country began to thunder. How would the people react? I have just adopted a different tactic. I just work."

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